

Book Review:

James Kennaway (ed.), *Music and the Nerves, 1700-1900* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.256, hardback, ISBN 13: 978-1-137-33950-8.

James Kennaway's anthology is based upon an interdisciplinary approach towards the relationship between neurology and music, consisting of articles by historians in diverse fields such as culture, music, medicine and science. The book unfolds a history of neurological discourses on music in specific eras and locations including England in the eighteenth century (by Penelope Gouk), France between 1780 and 1830 (by Ingrid J. Sykes), Spain in the eighteenth-century (by Pilar León-Sanz), and *fin-de-siècle* Vienna (by Alexandra Hui). In so doing, most of those authors also touch upon wider issues such as how views concerning the separation of body and mind, and the mechanisms of the human auditory sense, changed over time. The immediate success of the book's interdisciplinary approach is shown in Chapter Seven co-authored by the musicologist Amy B. Graziano and the cognitive neuroscientist Julene K. Johnson. It demonstrates that in the 19th century music was employed as a direct tool for examining the functions of the human brain as well as being a phenomenon grounded in its own discipline.

However, this book is not designed to be a simple 'chronological catalogue' of changing ideas. George Rousseau's chapter (which outlines an almost entire history of discussions on music and the mind) is astutely structured so as to reveal the twists and turns of the author's long-term and still ongoing quest for the answer to a question which was posited by his musical coach during his student days: that is, whether or not one sees 'pictures in mind' when playing 'absolute' music. (It remains unclear as to whether this possibility refers to all absolute music, whether pictures are the only mental imaginings in the presence of such music, or whether they happen from necessity, by choice, or through culture). Aris Sarafianos, in a close reading of Richard Brocklesby's *Reflections on Antient and Modern Music* (1749) together with some iconographical research, explores a different issue. He not only traces practices in eighteenth-century Britain of what we now call 'music therapy' but also places such practices within the context of the politics and culture of that time - though we should note that another contributor Gouk has reservations about the extent to which Brocklesby's theories were put into practice. In a rather surprising twist, Sarafianos concludes by proposing a connection between the 'quietist' Brocklesby and the sexologist James Graham, two seemingly disparate figures in the field.

In the opening chapter, Kennaway outlines the agendas of this volume. First, the book is to 'provide a basis for overcoming some of the misunderstandings and misconceptions that come from having parallel debates in different disciplines'. Second, it will give 'the neuroscience of music a historical context', and those in musicology 'a solid grounding in the medical culture of specific periods' (p.13). Concerning the second point, this volume is particularly successful - I myself, a historical musicologist who is interested in the interaction of music and medical culture, have

benefited very much from the insights here relating to medical culture. However, the problem concerning this anthology is that it has not quite clarified a fundamental issue, which the book itself has posed: 'what is neural about our experience of music and what is contextual and social' (p.6). And, in relation to that problem, neither does the volume discuss whether there is a distinction to be made between registering music *with the brain* and experiencing it *with the mind*? After all, music is more than impactful sound. To be sure, animals can sense the impact of sounds, but one might doubt that they can hear music as music, since it seems unlikely (or, more accurately, there has been no convincing demonstration of the fact) that they hear sounds either metaphorically or 'architecturally'. In fact, sounds intended as music become meaningful entities through our comprehension not only of their impact, but also of their representational and intentionally expressive dimensions and their import for us as part of culture. Such properties contribute to the value and significance of music as much as its 'physical' effectiveness. Certainly this is one of the areas that aesthetics has been tackling for the past centuries not only by attempting to explain the mechanisms of musical causation but also by evaluating the 'performativeness' of its meanings.

More uneasiness comes from some of the contributors' unresisting acceptance of 'traditional' views. Quite a few times, we are told of the dichotomy of 'programme music' which is mimetic and 'absolute music' which is beyond 'meaning'. Putting aside the question of to what extent programme music can be mimetic or whether absolute music is simply formalistic, the absolute/programmatic dichotomy has already been questioned by several aestheticians and musicologists, including Carl Dahlhaus and Peter Kivy who have been mentioned in this volume as if they were advocates of the separation. Equally problematically, if something is 'beyond meaning' does that mean it is 'meaningless' — and if it is, what could possibly be the basis of our interest in it?

Similarly, the volume does not incorporate recent musicological studies concerning Eduard Hanslick. Hanslick is presented repeatedly as the foremost opponent against the tenet - fundamental to musico-neurologists - that music affects the human being. But we now know much more about the artifices that Hanslick employed, not to deny the emotiveness of music, but to exclude the uncontrollable and varied nature of musical effects from his neat theories of music as a defined entity and causal agent.¹

Perhaps the most regrettable aspect of the volume is its lack of any sustained discussion of the role of 'interpretation' in our understanding of music. This is particularly disappointing since, at the onset of the volume, Kennway does mention the innovative theories of the so-called 'New Musicology' (a movement that is now at least thirty years old). However, traces of the 'new musicological' approach are hard to find in the volume --- even if the only 'purely musicological'

¹ For this issue, see Anthony Pryer's insightful analysis in 'Hanslick, Legal Processes, and Scientific Methodologies: How Not to Construct an Ontology of Music', in *Rethinking Hanslick*, eds. Siobhán Donovan and Wolfgang Marx and (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013) pp. 52-69.

contribution by Wiebke Thormählen offers an interesting discussion of how Liszt's virtuosity stands over a rupture between the body and the mind, and draws on much more than mere source studies. The role of the body in listening to performing and expressing music (as well as using it to create a sense of presence and identity) deserves a higher profile in a book such as this, if only to counterbalance Rousseau's fixation with 'pictures in the mind'.

That said, collaborative engagement between scholars of diverse fields is certainly worthwhile and this volume is interesting and thought-provoking in that regard. However, there is some way to go before such inter-disciplinary projects can move beyond a vague utopian notion.

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